DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 438 CS 209 228

AUTHOR Duke, Charles R.
TITLE An Introduction to "Re-search" Writing.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northwest Regional Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (Seattle, WA, April 25-27, 1985).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Comparative Analysis; Research Methodology; *Research Papers (Students); Secondary Education; Student Research; *Teaching Methods; United States History; *Writing Exercises; *Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

To change the perceptions that research writing is somehow different from other writing, teachers need to place more emphasis on the "search" in student research papers. An intermediate assignment can help bridge the gap between the totally personal search and the more formal and traditional research paper approach. The assignment asks students to look at events, people, places, and things that existed at the time the students were born and at similar events, people, places, and things that exist now. Their assignment is to identify clues in the materials they examine that suggest possible contrasts or comparisons between the two time periods and to build a case for the significance of these contrasts and comparisons. Students skim an issue of one magazine from each of the two periods, then read them more thoroughly, completing a worksheet on the contents. Advertisements provide a good starting point for comparison and contrast. Once students find connections, they pull them out and look at them in isolation, trying to determine their significance and organizing them so that they lead to some kind of conclusion. Having arrived at the conclusion and having discovered how the gathered material supports the conclusion, the student organizes and completes successive drafts of an essay. (The assignment, a sample worksheet, and examples of comparisons are included.) (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED260438

Dr. Charles R. Duke
Department of Secondary
Education, UMC 28
Utah State University

An Introduction to "Re-search" Writing

In the traditional sense, research writing usually has meant the "research" or "term" paper, and most of the teaching emphasis for such writing falls on the form to be followed. But a key step in all writing is the "re-search" for knowledge, an attempt to find and put into form recognizable and useful to others the knowledge we have accumulated through personal experience or library searches, interviews, or observations. Students, and more specifically, teachers, have come to believe, however, that research writing is somehow quite different from other writing.

To change this perception more emphasis is needed on the search, the seeking out of an idea and the pursuit of information related to that idea. To accomplish this and provide a meaningful writing experience for students, we do not have to resort to the blockbuster term paper and the apparatus that accompanies it. Instead, students can engage in a series of experiences that lead them to search for knowledge to build understanding beyond their immediate experience while helping them discover the means for communicating the results of their search to others. Ken Macrorie suggests in Searching Writing (Hayden, 1980) that such efforts should be I-centered: ". . . the I-search comes out of a student's life and answers a need in it." But for those instructors and students who may find it difficult to break away completely from the highly structured term paper approach, I'd like to suggest an intermediate assignment which helps to bridge the gap between the totally personal search and the more formal and traditional research paper approach.

CS209228

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Charles R. Duke

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Most young people lack skill in developing a sense of perspective, of looking at things from a distance and trying to determine what they may mean. How many times, for example, have adults tried to impress upon the younger generation how much life has changed--or even stayed the same--between the adults' early times and students' present time. Comparing or contrasting the past with the present often leads to some interesting observations about the world, observations which could lead students to an understanding of why things are as they are in their generation. That element of the past and present can become the focus of some useful student writing that must go beyond immediate experiences to achieve a perspective.

Using information or evidence drawn from sources other than personal experience calls for some adjustments in preparation for writing. No longer can students just brainstorm for a few minutes, select their examples, decide upon a focus and then begin to write. Instead, they must seek out evidence, analyzing what makes sense and what does not, try out different ways of classifying the data, and then decide what the information adds up to and how it supports the idea that started them on the search or suggests an idea worth exploring further. Dealing with such a process calls for a systematic approach that can be applied to many such searches. To introduce such an approach to students, I use an assignment called "Past and Present."

The assignment asks students to look at events, people, places, and things which existed at the time the students were born and at similar events, people, places, and things that exist now. Students should look upon themselves as detectives in this case; their assignment is to identify clues in the materials they examine that suggest possible contrasts or comparisons between how things were when the students were born and how those things are now. Their purpose is to build a case to explain the

significance of these contrasts and comparisons. See Figure 1 for the hand-out explaining the assignment.

Students should do some browsing before beginning the assignment in earnest; this permits them to become familiar with various magazines, their formats, and their typical subject matter. Students are encouraged to limit their searches to magazines like Time or Esquire because these magazines have distinctive formats and audiences which have tended to standardize the magazines over a span of years, making the search easier to conduct. Once students have a feel for the kinds of information that can be found in such sources, the search can be narrowed to a particular magazine.

Prior to letting students begin their search, some class time devoted to "searching" a typical magazine will pay dividends. I use back issues of Time or Newsweek, remembering to collect an ample supply from colleagues and my own subscription before beginning the assignment. On the day I introduce the assignment, I bring the issues to class and ask students to construct a worksheet. See Figure 2.

Once this is accomplished, and I have presented each student with a copy of a magazine, I introduce students to the "skim/scan." I ask them simply to flip through the issue, skimming and scanning the various pages, including cover page, index or table of contents, major headings, main features, advertisements, etc. If students have never read the magazine before, their journey may be a little slow but usually the skim/scan takes only five to ten minutes.

With the skim/scan completed, students then settle in for a return trip through the pages. Here they turn to their worksheets. The table of contents provides major headings or topics for students to place on the

worksheet; then they begin to work through the issue, skimming each article and jotting down just enough information on the work-sheet under the appropriate heading so that later they will have an idea of focus under each topic. At this point, everyone is simply on a fishing trip and has no idea of what may surface. A completed worksheet will look like the one in Figure 3 (note that in this case, the student has completed both sides of the worksheet and has the span of years represented).

Once the canvassing of contents has occurred, students need to sit back and review what they have, studying both sides of the worksheet. Sometimes it helps at this point to take a sample worksheet such as the one in Figure 3 and use it as a model for showing students how to examine their material. For instance, the sample worksheet shows at least two possibilities for further study. We could, for starters, focus on advertisements. We might look only at cigarette ads; or automobile advertisements might yield some interesting information. In this case, at least one Renault ad appeared in both issues, but the older ad stressed fuel efficiency and winter reliability; in the newer ad, Renault is paired with American Motors and nothing is said about winter reliability. A student might study these ads and return to the magazines to see if any others might be used to form a basis for discussing apparent changes in automobile advertising and their significance.

Another possibility emerges under Science. Material here appears ready-made for further study: a spy satellite in 1961 and a space telescope in 1981. Just the words themselves suggest a possible shift in space technology from spying and military defense to scientific exploration. So it should go as students criss cross their lists, looking for any clues that might lead to further exploration of comparisons or contrasts.

Having determined that a connection might exist between one or more topics or areas, students return to the two issues and study those particular areas carefully. They read slowly, taking notes on details, facts, examples--anything which might prove useful in building a case. Students do not need to know elaborate or formal note-taking skills to do this, but they should be reminded to be accurate, since later they may have only the notes from which to write up their findings. Throughout the close reading of the material in question, students should remember they are looking for points of comparison or contrast. What is talked about in one time period has to be talked about from another or the absence will have to be explained. Figure 4 offers an example of one student's completed worksheet.

We can learn about the search process from looking at this student's worksheet. When he started the list, the student didn't know what he might find, so he went ahead and read the material, putting down what seemed both interesting and relevant. Of course, when the list is made first on one side, it becomes easier to organize the second. Some writers find it helpful to draw lines showing which pieces of material connect. Not every item connects, of course; but this can be an impetus either to look for more information or consider whether the material needs to be used at all. Those not so fortunate in finding connections may have to return to the preliminary stage and take another set of issues at a slightly earlier or later date than the first ones.

Once students find connections, they pull them out and look at them in isolation, trying to determine their significance and to organize them so they lead to some kind of conclusion. Figure 5 shows one way the student working with the Cuba articles could look at his information and arrive at a conclusion.

Having arrived at the conclusion and having discovered how the gathered material supports the conclusion, the student next moves to the most effective way of presenting the information. Organizing this kind of writing is not that difficult since the comparison/contrast choice has already been made; the primary question is what form of comparison/contrast might best be used. Here the instructor will find it useful to discuss different ways of using comparison/contrast or to review with students their prior experiences in using that strategy.

At this stage in the development of the piece, students also find it useful to talk with a partner about their search. As students talk, they stress the main point of their search and encourage their partners to ask questions and test the idea. Students should invite challenges at this stage, since finding out now that a conclusion is weak saves much grief later on. Looking at each other's worksheets during these conversations and discussing specific pieces of information also prove helpful.

The next step is, of course, a rough draft of the essay. Here students may make an interesting discovery. Accustomed to writing from memory, they find that notes are helpful but really do not write the paper for them. Instead, they must weave the fragments of information into their own words to form a complete picture. That means thoughts and interpretations come into the process and they have to be added to the notes to help the information hold together. Writers who ignore this usually produce drafts that look and read like Western Union telegrams. Some instructors help students at this stage by having them look at previous efforts for this assignment or samples from popular periodicals that use the same approach. Students should keep in mind the case or point they are trying to develop and should observe the following guidelines:

a. My main idea must be sharply focused throughout the essay so my readers will know when they finish why I think the material is significant.

b. Any information I present must be clearly related to the main idea of the essay.

c. I will need to set up and keep a consistent pattern of comparison/contrast that helps me make my point.

d. I will need to make the specific sources and dates for my information clear to my readers so they can check it if they wish.

With their drafts somewhat polished, students prepare to share them with classmates. Prior to that, however, each writer does a self-evaluation that can be used as a basis for comparison with what the audience says about the draft. Here are some elements that might be used for such a self-evaluation.

1. Write in a clear sentence the key idea that you attempted to prove or show.

2. Identify what you consider the strongest part of the essay and explain why; give several specific examples from this part that are particularly effective.

3. Identify what you consider the weakest part of the essay and explain why.

With the self responses recorded, students share their drafts in peer groups for response. Written responses may be the most useful at this point because of the nature of the material, which tends to be somewhat more complex than regular personal experience writing. Peer reviewers can be encouraged to respond to such questions as these:

1. What is the main idea or conclusion developed in the essay? Where does this main idea become the clearest for the reader and is this the most effective place for it to appear?

2. Study the organization of the paper carefully; identify places where the writer has signaled the reader well about the relationship of ideas, facts or incidents; if there are places where the organization seems less effective, point those out and make suggestions for improvement.

3. How clearly and how often does the writer cite evidence drawn from the reading of outside sources? How do you as a reader know the information is from such sources?

4. How effectively does the writer handle the shift from past to present or from present to past? Identify places where this effectiveness is evident. If there are places where the shift does not work, indicate those and make suggestions for improvement.

5. Examine the opening and closing of the essay. What are the strong and weak points of each? How could the weak points be strengthened?

6. What single major improvement would you recommend the writer make in this draft and why?

After students receive the written critiques, they can compare the responses with their own self-assessments to note points of agreement or disagreement. Writers may choose to revise in light of the comments received or may seek further explanations from their peers. Finally, students turn to the editing of their drafts in preparation for publication and do a final check on dates, names, and places. When all is in readiness, students submit the papers. Many instructors like to post the essays because they usually represent such a wide range of interests, and the resulting crowds around the bulletin board suggest that students appreciate reading the results of their peers' research.

This process, and the essay that results from it, can become an important step across that gap between total reliance on relating personal experience to using information drawn from outside sources. The time spent in the process is worthwhile because of the foundation it builds for later, more ambitious undertakings, and most students find something that piques their interest and that draws them into the "re-search" process which forms a basis for all writing.

FIGURE 1

Past and Present Assignment

Topic: Events, people, places or objects in the world and America which existed at the time you were born and events, people, places and things which exist now.

Purpose: To identify key differences or similarities between the two times and to explain their significance.

Audience: People like yourself, not too well informed at the start but rather curious to know what may remain constant over time and what changes.

Materials: Magazines such as Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, Harper's, The New Yorker, or specialty magazines such as Sports Illustrated, Popular Mechanics, Esquire, McCall's, Scientific American; you may also use newspapers like the New York Times, Washington Post, San Francisco Herald. Avoid use of local newspapers.

Note: You must use the same publication throughout the assignment; select a copy of the publication which appeared on or near your birth date and a copy of the same publication published on or near your latest birthday.

FIGURE 2

Magazine or Newspaper _____ Magazine or Newspaper _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

Topic 1: Topic 1:

Topic 2: Topic 2:

FIGURE 3

Work Sheet

Time February 9, 1981	Time February 10, 1961
1. Cover Story--Brooke Shields and the modern model--life and fame	1. Cover Story--Speaker of House Sam Rayburn; political power moves in Congress
2. Nation--Hostages welcome home; personal accounts of imprisonment; lessons learned from Iranian crisis	2. Nation--The economy; recession; start of Kennedy's presidency; defense capability vs. that of Russians
3. World--Mideast--Islam nations unable to reach agreement on Iran/ Iraq conflict; agreed to aid UN in settling Afghanistan	3. World--Iraq--attitude changed toward West; Congo war
4. Science--outerspace telescope increases scientists' view of universe 350 times as much as previous instruments; no problem getting pictures back	4. Science--all-seeing satellite launched; "spy in the sky" function; cloaked in Air Force secrecy; problem getting pictures back to earth; chimp in space.
5. Sports--Oakland Raiders upset Eagles; Super Bowl afterwards	5. Sports--Track-Millrose Games; skiing competition
6. Advertisements--Imported cars; Renault 18: being sold by American Motors; "forced" partnership? emphasis on mileage even with Cadillac; cigarette ads--wording, presence of surgeon general's warning; Benson & Hedges--image of woman; Television and stereos--video recorders; detailed specifications	6. Advertisements--Compact cars--Valiant, Dart; emphasis on suspension, quietness, classic style; image of success; V-8 Turbine; Renault--40 mpg; winter car; extra hot heater; Thunderbird; equipment--water coolers, IBM electric; computers for missiles; only one beer ad--Schlitz; several whiskey ads; cigarette ad for Philip Morris King Size Commander

FIGURE 4

Magazine: Newsweek, June 5, 1961
Focus: "Reason for Hope" article
Notes
Response to Bay of Pigs Invasion in April 1961 (referred to in May 29, 1961

1,214 men captured by Castro. Castro wanted to barter captives for 500 tractors; Caterpillar tractors Model D-8; worth 35,000-$50,000 dollars.

Castro found U.S. was involved in planning stage of invasion; U.S. felt responsible for men that had been captured.

Castro thought he could ridicule U.S. by suggesting trade; U.S. took proposal seriously; thought the trade would be seen as humane by rest of the world.

Citizens like Walter Reuther (United Auto Workers head); Dr. Milton Eisenhower, and Eleanor Roosevelt were special Tractors for Freedom Committee members and in charge of getting private donations.

Castro saw U.S. serious so had prisoners elect 10 representatives; sent them to Miami to barter; taken to White House.

Country's reaction quite negative; "When, oh when will we stop being blackmailed by Castro"--Senator Homer Capeheart.

Contributions to Tractors for Freedom fund declared tax deductible; President Kennedy thought contribution "every bit as charitable an act as a donation to CARE."

Historical notes: only other documented time men exchanged for machines or suggestion made; in WWII the Nazis offered a million Jews for 10,000 trucks. Exchange of people for people has occurred many times.

Magazine: Newsweek, May 26, 1980
"Carter and the Cuban Influx"
Notes
Result of Refugee Act of 1980 (what is that?); defined refugees as people "unable or unwilling to return to their homeland." Cubans seen as undocumented aliens seeking asylum.

Cubans numbered over 60,000 arrive in Florida.

Diplomatic struggle between Castro and President Carter.

Castro saw chance to embarrass U.S. and relieve some pressure at home; encouraged migration of hundreds of social misfits and other undesirables; cleaned out prisons.

"Castro, in a way, is using people like bullets aimed at this country," Jack Watson, White House aide.

Castro generated anti-American feeling in Cuba by suggesting all people leaving were traitors.

U.S. not prepared to cope with flood; elite came; then tradesmen; then mental and criminal elements; 9,000 refugees arrive in Florida in one day; no place to house, food, etc.

Govt. tried to stop flow: private boat owners fined if caught transporting; many boats impounded; criminal element set aside.

Castro had three demands for stopping the people: U.S. give up military base in Guantanamo Bay; lift economic sanctions against Cuba; stop high altitude intelligence flights over Cuba.

Negative public reaction balanced against desire of Cubans now living in America to get friends and relatives out of Cuba while the opportunity was there.

FIGURE 5

1. Both incidents were caused by some action of the U.S.

   1961--invasion of Cuba

   1980--passage of Refugee Act

2. Both incidents involved exchange of people for benefit of Cuba.

   1961--gained tractors

   1980--asked for military base, removal of economic sanctions, and stopping of intelligence flights; got as a bare minimum, relief of populations overcrowding and removal of many undesirables

3. Both incidents caused negative reactions in U.S.

   1961--Senator Cafeheart's comment

   1980--White House aide's statement

4. U.S. responded to both incidents on "humanitarian" grounds.

   1961--get men out of jail

   1980--could not turn people away who were seeking refuge in America, "the land of the free"

Conclusion: Both incidents demonstrate that in twenty years the U.S. has been unable to find an effective way of keeping Castro and Cuba from putting us on the defensive and embarrassing us in the eyes of the world.